

Ministry to Priests program travels well 'down under'

By Teresa A. Parsons

Off the altar, priests from the Diocese of Melbourne, Australia, usually wear shirts and ties rather than traditional clerical garb. Their parochial schools are state-supported, and for breakfast the priests consider spaghetti and baked beans a treat.

Despite these differences in attire and taste, three priests from Rochester who recently visited Melbourne found that the struggles and joys at the heart of priesthood supersede cultural and generational boundaries.

In November, 1985, Fathers Kevin Murphy and James Boyle, members of Rochester's Ministry to Priests team, took part in a spiritual awareness retreat that introduced the ministry program to the Diocese of Melbourne. In September, Father Jim Schwartz had led a similar retreat for priests of the Archdiocese of Brisbane. All 15 Australian dioceses are adopting the program, developed in 1972 by Father Vincent Dwyer, O.S.C.O., and initiated in Rochester in 1978. During the last decade, the program has been adopted by dioceses in a number of countries.

The spiritual awareness retreat is one of three components of Ministry to Priests. Also included are one-on-one counseling and support groups. All three promote a "holistic spirituality" by encouraging priests to keep a healthy balance between work and recreation, prayer life and social life.

All over the world, that balance is becoming harder and harder to maintain. The shortage of new priests places increasing demands on existing populations. Meanwhile, the average age for priests nationwide is over 50 and is creeping steadily higher.

Because their ministry doesn't confine itself to working hours and since they most often live where they work, priests tend to become workaholics. In the process, they neglect their human needs for relaxation, recreation and socializing, according to Father Schwartz, who heads the local Ministry to Priests team.

Priests everywhere are also challenged by changing roles and expectations. Social

justice, group dynamics and participatory leadership, communications skills and counseling are areas only recently covered by seminary training. But regardless of age or background, a priest is expected to be expert at everything from theology to crisis intervention to budgeting. Such differences in age and training also divide priests of different generations.

The result is, in a word, stress. And without an intimate network of family and friends for support, a priest can become isolated and alienated, vulnerable to a range of unhealthy reactions from alcoholism to emotional and relational disorders.

Members of the diocesan team believe that using spirituality as the common bond, priests can overcome issues that normally divide them and help one another meet the challenges of their ministry.

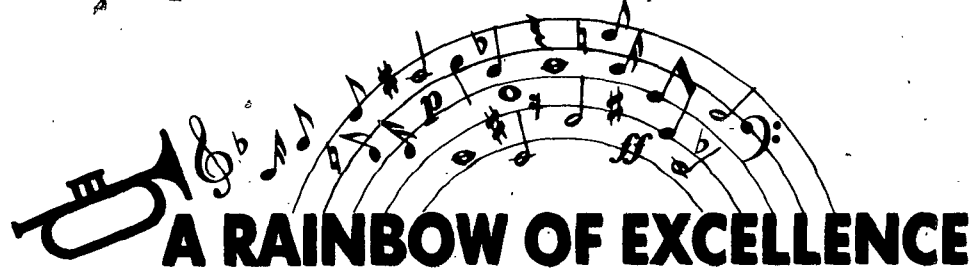
Father Schwartz calls Ministry to Priests a bridge between psychology and spirituality. As part of the spiritual awareness retreat, for instance, psychological tests are offered. By examining the results, a priest can determine his own strengths and weaknesses. Then, as a follow-up, the program asks each participant to develop and maintain a personal growth plan.

"It's important not to see ministry to priests as an exclusive thing," Father Schwartz explained. "Their support comes from a wide variety of directions. But priests also need to be honest with each other and recognize their own vulnerabilities... One of the loneliest places to be is to be unsupported by your fellow priests."

Ministry to Priests may be new to Australia, but it has nevertheless given local team members new insights and enthusiasm for the program in the Diocese of Rochester. In Melbourne, for instance, the program began with 70 team members for a total of 350 priests. One suggestion was to expand the size of the 11-member ministry team here to allow for a more personal outreach.

"There's tremendous enthusiasm generated by the retreat," Father Schwartz said. "We need to find out how to sustain that enthusiasm."

Rally planned for Catholic schools



More than 9,000 children from diocesan Catholic schools plan to attend a rally Thursday, Feb. 6, at the Rochester War Memorial to celebrate Catholic Schools Week.

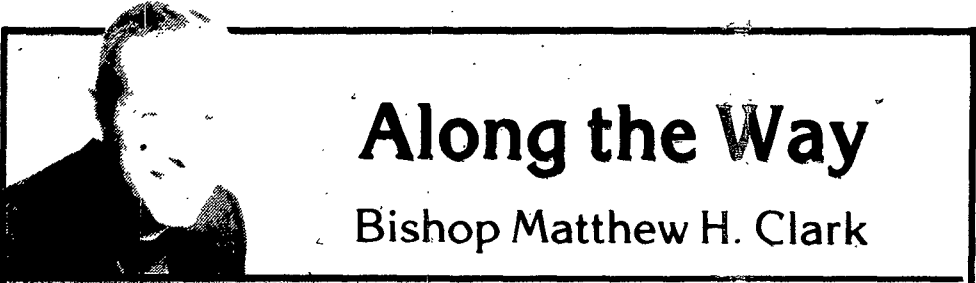
"The purpose is to show solidarity among all the Catholic schools — that we are strong and we're educating an awful lot of children in Christian values," said Sister Clare Francis Mogenhan, SSJ, an organizer of the event and principal of Our Lady of Perpetual Help School. "It's easy to think you're just one little isolated school until you get together with the whole group and see you're really quite large."

Already, representatives of 40 schools have said they plan to participate, she said. Sponsored by the diocesan General Education Department, the rally is expected to last

from 10 a.m. to noon. Musical entertainment by students from Catholic high schools will be featured along with a slide show with pictures from each school. Sister Carol Cimino, Nazareth Academy's director of development, will serve as master of ceremonies.

Organizers are now seeking donations to cover the expenses of the rally, which they estimate at \$2,500. For more information, or if you are able to help in any way, contact Sister Virginia Steinwachs, (716)328-3210, ext. 247, or Sister Clare Francis, (716)266-7605.

"It's a very exciting moment," Sister Clare Francis said. "We're living with a sense of hope. If it is the work of the Lord — and we believe it is — it will continue."



Along the Way Bishop Matthew H. Clark

If you have ever tried to describe for a non-swimmer what it's like to plunge into water, or to cut across its surface, or to enjoy the tranquility of its depths, you know how difficult it is to convey in words what that experience is really like.

I have a strong sense of that kind of difficulty now, as I remember my recent visit to Chile to participate in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of our Sisters of Mercy among the poor of Santiago.

It's easy enough to recall the events of those graced days. Among those I have thought about since my return are: the Eucharistic liturgy on December 15, which gathered hundreds of friends in praise and thanksgiving to our loving God for the blessings of the years; a visit to the barren Southern Zone of the city to which Kay Schwenzer, Anne Marie Mathis and Joanne Deck will soon move to serve in solidarity with the poor; a trip with Margaret Mungovan to the American Consulate to intercede (unsuccessfully!) on behalf of a young man who wants to come to our country; the festive celebration of Jane Kenrick's silver jubilee as a Sister of Mercy; a conversation with a Chilean writer who stands in danger of imprisonment because she criticized the government in one of her film reviews; a picnic in a mountain valley with Ann Gleeson, Jackie Ford and Janet Korn; a wonderful day at the beach with all of our sisters and many of their friends; the thoroughly delightful opportunity to be with Lia Gonzales, Soledad Cantillana, Maria Elena Prado and Cielita Lagos, who are the first Chilean members of our Mercy Community.

There are 30 other experiences I could mention to suggest to you what those days were like. But even the most

exhaustive list could not capture adequately the impact the people of Chile made on me. How can I explain the laughter of people whose hard lives might easily leave them joyless? How can I convey a sense of the generosity of very poor people who are so ready to give of their substance to those who have even less? How can I make my own, much less communicate to others, the powerful gift of Christ's love made so readily available in the compassion of the poor?

I must say to you on this bright morning that I don't know the answers to these questions. But I do welcome them as an invitation to prayer during the Christmas season and am confident that the Lord will continue the good thing begun in me through the sheer goodness of so many with whom I have been privileged to share these days.

An example of that goodness I share with you in the words of Margaret Mungovan: "What attracts me so much? It is the people. I came thinking to serve them and I found myself served, inspired, encouraged and loved by them. They reveal God to me daily. It isn't that they are without defects. Like all of us, they have plenty of those. But their deep faith in God's providence, their simplicity, affection, hospitality, great sense of humor and their determination to carry on in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles make them a very special people!"

Special thanks to Jean Marie Kearse, Judith Heberle and Janet Korn for their gracious company on this journey and to Janet Caulfield, who so kindly surrendered her room for my use during my visit and offered countless other kindnesses. I am truly grateful.

Peace to all.

Cenacle Evening of Reflection

The Cenacle Center for Spiritual Renewal will offer "On the Way Home," a program for working persons, Monday, Jan. 20, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Group sharing, quiet reflection, prayer and a light supper will be included.

For reservations, call the Cenacle, (716)271-8755. Offering is \$5.

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